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# Social class inequalities and international student mobility: the case of Brazilian students in the Portuguese higher education system

*Les inégalités sociales et la mobilité internationale des étudiants : le cas des étudiants brésiliens dans le système d'enseignement supérieur portugais*

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*Note: Authors in alphabetic order.*

## Introduction

- 1 Since the mid-1990s Brazil has experienced an expansion of its higher education system, which has included both the development of higher education institutions as well as a strong increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education. In parallel, Brazil has also become an important player in the internationalization of higher education, mostly as an origin country of students that seek higher education programmes abroad. One of the most important destinations of Brazilian students is Portugal, which has been very successful in attracting Brazilian students, particularly to its main universities. At the same time and despite progresses made, especially due to strong economic growth and the programmes to reduce poverty and extreme poverty introduced by Lula's government, Brazil remains a country deeply affected by inequalities. In 2013, 10% of the population with lower income received only 1.2% of total income. Both migration and education are shaped by social class inequalities however, little is actually known about the influence of class belonging in patterns of international student mobility. This paper seeks to explore this relationship in the case of Brazilian students in Portuguese higher education institutions. To what extent are students from lower class backgrounds part of these moves? How does origin class belonging shape options and patterns of student

mobility to Portugal? Data is drawn from interviews and a survey among Brazilian students in Portugal for the PhD project: “Trajectories of international student mobility: Brazilian students in higher education in Portugal”.

## Social Class, Migration and Education

- 2 In many ways both migration and education are simultaneously shaped and also contribute to shape class positioning. Migration scholars have been slow in acknowledging the role of social class in migration but important advances have been made in this field (Van Hear, 2014; Horst, Pereira & Sheringham, 2016). There is increasing recognition that migration is a classed project as class has an impact on who moves where and how and also on the formation of migration aspirations and on transnational social fields created after migration (Horst, Pereira & Sheringham, 2016; Fouron & Glick Schiller, 2001; Kelly & Lusi, 2006). Class is understood here as a relational concept which includes both material resources but also cultural and symbolic as well as social capital, as drawn from Bourdieu (1987). This definition also includes the dimension of class as contested terrain that is built in relationship to other members of society. The impacts of class on migration have been found in Brazilian migration to Europe, where the complexity and diversity of socio-profiles encountered point to the distinct forms in which individuals shape and understand their migration as these experiences are mediated by social class belonging (Horst, Pereira & Sheringham, 2016). To some extent, migration may also contribute to challenge class positions as in and through migration individuals are likely to experience an increase in economic resources, upward occupational mobility, access to different opportunities or life experiences, new relationships, wider social networks, etc. This may take place in different ways and can only be fully grasped if one considers the transnational dimension of migrants' lives (Fouron & Glick Schiller, 2001; Kelly & Lusi, 2006). For migrants, class belonging is negotiated transnationally as well as locally in contexts of arrival. It may be that the act of migration itself generates negotiations of new class positioning ‘back home’ even though it does not have the same immediate effect in the new country of residence (Kelly and Lusi, 2006). Similarly, regardless of occupational transformations or of confronting & class hierarchies after migration individuals from more affluent social classes may still refer to their original class positioning rather than to the new social structure (Kelly & Lusi, 2006; Horst, Pereira & Sheringham, 2016). Social class and migration interact and intersect in complex ways which are not clear cut or immediately apprehended without a detailed consideration of the full transnational spaces that migrants inhabit.
- 3 Social class has also shaped educational options, aspirations, trajectories and outcomes, especially in places where there is no single universal education system that provides equal educational opportunities for all but is rather stratified and dependent on resources. Within the UK for example there is already vast literature on the links between educational choices and social class (Brooks & Waters, 2013: 12). Access to higher education has historically been much more a privilege of the middle-upper classes than a pathway for the working class (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003, p. 1). As such, education will tend to reproduce rather than contest social class inequalities while legitimizing positions of advantage for the dominant social class (Bourdieu, 1987, 1985). A noteworthy exception would be the case of the Nordic countries where universal free education has been the norm enabling processes of social mobility which become, by and large,

independent of social class. However, participation in higher education has been widening and diversifying (OECD, 2001, p. 13). Education and especially access to higher education may also be a way of transcending or resisting original class positioning and class inequalities. The same OECD study (2001, p. 12) finds that upper secondary education constitutes a breaking point in many countries, above which additional education allows particularly higher earnings. It is very likely that with time those increased earnings and social status deriving from higher ranked occupations will be translated into a negotiation of new class positions. The expansion in access to education, which moved from the elites to the “masses” program (Bechi, 2011, p. 145), also generated the conditions – through knowledge, critical sense – for social movements that began to challenge existing class dominance (Frigotto, 2010). The expansion of higher education has also generated certain congestion in the transition to the labour market leading students to find differentiating factors to increase employability (Brooks & Waters, 2013, p. 11). One of such factors has been the pursuit of studies abroad or of other international experiences (Brooks & Waters, 2013, p. 11). International student mobility, commonly advertised as a way of further expanding educational competencies and gain new leeway in the current global knowledge society has indeed been experiencing an important growth and has been promoted in many countries worldwide, including in Brazil. Research has found that in some countries at least engaging in such international experiences does pay off upon return to the labour market in the origin country (Waters, 2007, work on Hong Kong nationals; Rizvi, 2000, for Malaysians). In the case of Brazil results of such experiences are more doubtful despite the strong public investment to fund study abroad programs (Fonseca, Pereira & Iorio, 2016, p. 280). Researchers have also found that student mobility has been more a way of retaining and reproducing privilege rather than a way of contesting or challenging those hierarchies, not least because considerable resources are needed to undertake mobility in the first place (Waters, 2012, p. 128). Studies have shown so far that “internationally mobile students: are financially secure; have the support (emotional and material) of family and friends (i.e. ‘social capital’); have been raised in an environment that places great value on formal education and credentials; have highly educated parents; and have experienced overseas travel as a child (Brooks & Waters, 2009a, b; Deakin, 2011; Findlay & King, 2010; King *et al.*, 2011; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Waters *et al.*, 2011)” (in Waters, 2012, p. 128).

- 4 Departing from this conceptual framework, one may pose a number of questions dealing with the intersections between social class and migration and social class and education:
  1. To what extent is international student mobility a benefit of the privileged upper classes?
  2. How is (the possibility) this mobility/migration benefiting the lower classes?
  3. To what extent is class belonging shaping access, aspirations and experiences of international student mobility?
- 5 We will discuss these questions with data from Brazilian student mobility to Portugal.

## Social Class Inequalities in Brazil: impacts on migration and education

### Social Class Inequalities in Brazil: impacts on migration

- 6 The context of socio-economic stagnation experienced by Brazil during the 1980s and into the 1990s was an important driver of migration that transformed the country to

include an important migration outflow dynamic (Pires, 1999). Around 1.5 million Brazilians left the country between mid-1980s and the end of 1990s (Martes, 2001, p. 8). The middle classes were especially affected by diminishing opportunities for further advancement largely as a result of the successive crisis, strong inflation and monetary devaluation, which was combined with less attraction capacity by Brazilian metropolises due to increased insecurity and declining quality of life (Martes, 2001, p. 8). The search for better opportunities for socio-economic upward mobility as well as for more stable career trajectories were important motives driving Brazilian emigration, however recent research has also found that multiple motives can be found among Brazilian migrants in Europe, and that these are strongly structured along class lines (Horst, Pereira & Sheringham, 2016). Departing from a context where there are strong social class divisions, the formulation of migration aspirations as well as the design of the migration project itself and how it is experienced also becomes deeply impacted by class as has been found in other contexts (Van Hear, 2014; Andrikopoulos, 2013). In a number of contexts the composition of migration flows also changes over time to increased levels of complexity. For example Padilla (2006, p. 3) discusses the “proletarianisation” of migration from Brazil to Portugal, showing how recent migrants have a lower-middle-class and working-class background whereas earlier waves tended to involve people from “the professional middle classes”. This trend is also observed in recent studies of Brazilians in other places, including the United States (Margolis, 2008) and the United Kingdom (Evans *et al.*, 2007, 2011; McIlwaine *et al.*, 2011). There are a number of key reasons for increased migration from Brazil, and for the possibility of migration as an option for people across the social strata, including technological advances facilitating and reducing the cost of international travel; the widespread circulation of information about potential destination countries; social networks and what scholars have named the “migrant division of labour” (May *et al.*, 2007). However, the ways in which this migration process is planned and experienced may differ substantially according to original class belonging. Several informants explicitly talk about “class” and describe migration as a classed project. Indeed, class impacts the motivations for migration and the way people understand its importance. For some, it is about investing in a new lifestyle, adventure or experience, whereas others migrate in order to create an alternative to a disadvantaged class position in Brazil. Joana, a researcher from Rio de Janeiro living in Campinas, interviewed by our team in another research project (THEMIS<sup>1</sup>), reflects back on her experience as a postgraduate student in the United Kingdom and on the migration projects of other Brazilians she came across there:

“Something more permanent, more fixed, with the intention ‘I am going to live here’ ... those guys that were there working. People that went to study were there for a defined period.”

- 7 The narratives of our informants illustrate such differences, and, in particular, those who consider themselves of a more affluent class make a point of clearly distinguishing themselves from others in a less privileged class position. More affluent migrants see their personal migration project as individualised and disconnected from others in Brazil, with little direct impact on the aspirations or livelihoods of those who remain there. The migration of those from lower-class backgrounds, on the other hand, is assumed much more as (potentially) generating migration aspirations and collective migratory processes mediated by direct feedback. For the latter, migration becomes a group mechanism of contesting a disadvantaged class position in the origin country.

- 8 In the next sections we want to distil in greater detail how class belonging is played out in education and international student mobility; in what sort of advantage/disadvantage mechanisms does it build on and what to what extent does it contribute to challenge original inequalities?

### **Social Class Inequalities in Brazil: impacts on education**

- 9 Brazil is a country with deep inequalities. In 2013, 10% of the population with lower income received only 1.2% of total income. This is also reflected in who has had access to education and where. In 1980 the average number of years of schooling was 2.6 and the illiteracy rate 25.4% (excluding the rural population of the States of Rondônia, Acre, Amazonas, Roraima, Pará and Amapá), 46.4% in rural areas (data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) /PNAD). In addition, children from lower class backgrounds are more likely to be enrolled in public schools than are children from more affluent families. According to the 2011 Brazilian National Household Survey (PNAD) the median monthly household per capita income in families with children enrolled in public schools was 36.6% of that income level for families with children enrolled in private schools. The percentage of children aged 7 to 14 enrolled in public schools goes down as household per capita income increases: for the first quintile of the household per capita income distribution it is 97% and for the fifth quintile it is down to 38% (Bursztyn, 2015, p. 5). But Brazil has also invested in access to education and experienced an increase in the number of years of schooling to 7.2 in 2011 and an increase in the education index (average years of schooling and estimate of the number of years children will remain in school) from 0.486 to 0.663 (1990 to 2011). Another crucial element in the country's recent developments has been a strong investment in the higher education system and in increasing and diversifying access to higher education. This was assumed as a state strategy to promote social transformation, sustainable development and the competitive insertion of the country in global markets (MEC, 2012, p. 9). This investment has included the creation of 18 new federal universities between 2003 and 2014, mostly outside state capitals, a strategy to decentralize access to higher education, which has also included the creation of new federal university campuses (increased from 148 to 274) and an increase in the number of municipalities with federal universities from 114 to 272 (MEC, 2012, p. 11). This thus enables those students with more limited resources to move to another municipality to attend university. Also in 2012, a quota system was introduced: 50% of places in public universities (59 federal universities and 38 institutes of education, science and technology recognized by the ministry of Education) have to be allocated to students coming from public schools (split between low income – corresponding to one minimum wage and a half or less –, and higher income – above one minimum wage and a half – and taking into account the “racial” composition in the state). Simultaneously, a number of programs were implemented to expand access to higher education: REUNI - to restructure and expand federal universities; UAB (Brazil Open University, composed of an integrated system of public universities, to provide higher education through distance learning, intended to reach populations with less access to higher education institutions, established in 2006); PROUNI – Program to fund low income students in private universities (created in 2004) (Góes Brennand and Góes Brennand, 2012) and also FIES, another funding scheme for students in higher education private institutions (renovated in 1999 to provide up to 100% funding to study in

recognized private institutions, with 3,4% interest rates and to be paid within 12 years maximum<sup>2</sup>).

- 10 The Census of Higher education in 2013 shows that there was a notable expansion in the number of students enrolled in higher education between 1996 and 2013. According to a study by Simões and Mello (2012) that analyzed the higher education Census of 2012 (INEP, 2012), the REUNI program was responsible for an increase of nearly 60% in annual enrollments in federal higher education institutions between 2007 and 2011. However, the strongest increase was in enrollments in private institutions; in 2013 only 26% of students in higher education were in public universities (INEP, 2013). On the one hand, this is related to a larger expansion in private institutions, according to INEP data (updated on May 7, 2015) there are 2,391 higher education institutions in Brazil, and the majority (2090) are private institutions. The Southeast Region of the country is home to the largest number (1145), and the State of São Paulo concentrates more than half (590). On the other, it is notorious that private institutions have been traditionally less prestigious within the Brazilian scientific system and those that have tended to absorb students unable to get into the most prestigious, and free, public institutions. Expansion of higher education seems to denote still the class cleavages that permeate Brazilian society, perpetuating the public (good quality)/private (poor quality) divide in student careers.
- 11 At the same time Brazil has also become a player in the internationalization of higher education, mostly as an origin country of international students. The association Belta which congregates organizations dealing with cultural and study trips abroad informed in March 2015 that the number of Brazilians studying abroad had increased 500% in a decade, with around 230 thousand young people studying abroad during that period (Portal Brasileiro Terra, 2015<sup>3</sup>). At the same time, in the last eight years the number of Visas granted to foreigners to study in Brazil also more than doubled, from 5,770 to 12,547 in 2013 (data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).
- 12 Some authors have argued that the evidence, to date, suggests that international education entrenches (and in some cases, particularly within emerging economies, indeed actively creates) social inequalities (Waters, 2012, p. 123). To what extent is international mobility constituted as a differentiating factor in a context of expanded access to higher education in Brazil, as has been found in other contexts? Is this path also accessible to lower class students? Or is it being developed as a mechanism to retain privilege by the upper classes? Is the destination a differentiating factor as well?

## International Student Mobility from a Class perspective: the case of Brazil

### General trends

- 13 International student mobility has been a part of Brazilian history since the country was a colony of Portugal, because the Portuguese crown prohibited the opening of higher education institutions in its colony. However, social structures at that time dictated that only the children of aristocrats and high officers in the Brazilian hierarchy were to be sent to Portugal, to the University of Coimbra, to complete their higher education in Law or Theology (Santos & Filho, 2012). Even after Brazil's independence in 1822 access to higher education, including international mobility, mostly to Portugal, remained a



privilege of the upper classes. It is only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the 1980s with an internal restructuring in the higher education system including the consolidation of postgraduate degrees that international circulation gains a new breath (Mazza, 2008, p. 11). With the aim of promoting the qualification of the country's human resources, support research and invest in Science and Technology, public funding was channeled into the attribution of scholarships to study abroad which opened up possibilities for Brazilians from different social classes, areas, institutions and regions, which had only previously existed for the elites (Mazza, 2008, p. 4). After 2001, one key development in the Brazilian higher education system was the creation of new forms of academic interchange through "university partnerships" and "consortiums of universities", initially with European countries and the United States and later extended to Latin America. This accelerated the internationalization of Brazilian universities (Zamberlam *et al.*, 2009, p. 62). In 2011, as a way of stimulating productivity and economic growth the Brazilian government created the program "Science Without Borders", to stimulate interchange and international mobility. The program foresaw an attribution of 101 thousand scholarships until the end of 2015. Data records the concession of 101,446 scholarships until July 2016. The main destinations in this program are the United States and UK, reflecting the attractive power of the Anglophone academic system, and the main areas of study Engineering and Technologies. According to Spears (2014), Brazil clearly sought to strengthen the links to the North American partner and to compete with China and India who also send large numbers of students in these fields to the US. From 2013 Portugal ceased to be a possible destination as the Brazilian government argued that acquiring a new language was also part of the program and that Portugal was being chosen because of the shared language and not because of academic excellence. This political option also largely reflects the uneven geographies of education and academic mobility that other authors have also highlighted (Waters, 2012, p. 124).

### Brazilian students in Portugal: Does class matter?

- 14 The program "Science Without Borders" did contribute to boost student mobility from Brazil to Portugal, reinforcing an already growing trend. Since the academic year 2008/2009 Brazil became the most important origin of foreign students enrolled in Portuguese higher education institutions.

**Table 1. Brazilian students enrolled in Portuguese higher education institutions.**

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Foreign students	17,950	18,584	18,049	19,425	22,109	29,045	30,757	33,283	29,039	33,097
% Brazilian students	12.3	15.7	21.1	22.8	24.1	24.1	28.7	26.5	25.3	26.3

  

Credit mobility	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2014/16	Degree mobility	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Foreign students	10,024	11,509	12,151	13,282	Foreign students	20,733	21,774	16,888	19,815
% Brazilian students	27.6	17.3	16.7	17.6	% Brazilian students	29.3	31.4	32.2	32.2

**SOURCE: DGEEC- DIRECTORATE-GENERAL STATISTICS OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

- 15 In this section we analyse data collected for the PhD project: "Trajectories of international student mobility: Brazilian students in higher education in Portugal" by



doctoral student Juliana Iorio, at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning from the University of Lisbon, funded by FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology.

- 16 The first phase of fieldwork was qualitative and involved interviews with the Directors and/or Vice-Directors of Colleges and / or Institutes of Higher Education in Portugal that had received the highest proportion of students of Brazilian nationality, according to the data of the secondary sources. During this stage 42 Brazilian students who were in Portuguese higher education institutions in Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto were also interviewed. Purposive snowball sampling through social networks (including social media as Facebook) was used. In addition, 10 interviews were carried out with students that had already returned to Brazil (to São Paulo and Minas Gerais) after a period of study in Portugal. During the second stage of fieldwork the collection of qualitative data was complemented with the application of an online questionnaire, available to all Brazilian students who were in Portuguese higher education between October 2015 and January 2016, which generated 449 valid responses. In this survey, 60% of respondents were females, 67% were single and the majority (57.6%) between 19 and 30 years old. The majority came from the Southeast Region of Brazil (38%), distributed by the states of São Paulo (43%), Rio de Janeiro (29%) and Minas Gerais (24%), which correspond to the largest sending areas of Brazilian students to Portugal. However, the sample had representatives from the 26 Brazilian states, and from 147 different municipalities. Considering the sending mesoregions, it was also noticed that the majority of these students lived in the mesoregion where the state capital is situated, that is, they did not live in rural areas. In addition, among the students that were in a Brazilian higher education institution before coming to Portugal (42%), the vast majority (74%) were in a public institution.
- 17 In this survey respondents were asked to report which social class they belonged to according to the Brazilian system, and we used the reference in Brazilian statistics based on income level (and also self-perceptions). We observe a distribution of students across social classes but with higher concentrations in the middle-class levels B2 and B1 (Table 2):

**Table 2. Social class distribution of Brazilian students in higher education in Portugal.**

Social Class	N	%
A	40	9
B1	129	29
B2	151	34
C1	72	16
C2	45	10
DE	12	3
Total	449	100

**A (AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME AT LEAST R\$ 20,272.76); - B1 (AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME R\$ 8,695.88 TO R\$ 20,272.76); B2 (AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME R\$ 4,427.36 TO R\$ 8,695.88); C1 (AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME R\$ 2,409.01 TO R\$ 4,427.36); C2 (AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME R\$ 1,446.24 TO R\$ 2,409.01); DE (AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME BELOW R\$ 1,446.24).**

**SOURCE: OWN SURVEY**

- 18 Since economic resources are fundamental to engage in international mobility we also looked at whether students had been funded to conduct their studies abroad and found that the majority was self-funded (57%). Since the introduction of the Status of the International Student in Portugal in 2014, which stipulated higher fees for third country nationals, self-funded students will have to rely on a larger pool of resources to fund their access to Portuguese higher education institutions and therefore are more likely to originate from more affluent families.
- 19 Intersecting funding through scholarships and class (Table 3) we observe that the majority of Brazilian students that had been funded were from lower class backgrounds (C2 and DE with 60 and 75% on scholarships, respectively).

**Table 3. Number of students on scholarship per social class.**

Social Class	With Scholarship	Without Scholarship	Total	% with Scholarship per Class
A	9	31	40	23
B1	55	74	129	43
B2	60	91	151	40
C1	32	40	72	44
C2	27	18	45	60
DE	9	3	12	75

Total	192	257	449	43
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Source: own survey

- 20 Even though there are fewer students from the lower social classes it is indeed notorious the role of access to scholarships in promoting international student mobility for students with fewer resources. In the case of Brazilian students, international student mobility has also become an opportunity for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds largely due to public policy that has invested in education to fight inequalities and also in providing the financial mechanisms necessary to engage in study abroad programs. This is revealed also in the interviews. For example, Rosana in Lisbon, coming from a public university in Brazil comments:
- “I come from a reality where I would not have had the conditions to come in 2009... if I am here today doing my PhD is mostly because I got that scholarship in 2009.”
- 21 Ricardo, in Porto, from private university in Brazil says:
- “... there are many opportunities (scholarships) to study abroad. When I was younger, to have that was like winning the lottery.”
- 22 At the same time, there seems to be a confidence on the opportunities that would be further opened beyond the mobility as a mechanism to resist and transcend class inequalities, as Alina, in Lisbon, coming from a public university in Brazil illustrates:
- “I will be the first PhD in my family... Brazil is experiencing today a context that, for who has a degree and committed to studying, is good.”
- 23 Public investment in grants to study abroad has mostly come from Brazilian institutions. Among the students interviewed in our research 66% with those with scholarship were funded by a Brazilian institution.
- 24 However, the resources are still an important constraint. Those unable to get the pool of resources needed to study abroad become severely limited in the option for international student mobility:
- “With Capes for the international exchange, you need to have some financial means to live abroad... only with the scholarship. As I study at a private university, where the fee is very high, most students do not apply to study abroad because they have to work to pay for the fee” (Karina, in Lisbon).
- 25 Nevertheless, due to a perception of the advantages in terms of upward mobility following international study programs some students from less affluent families are pursuing such programs by engaging in other income earning strategies. Leandro, in Lisbon clearly states the perception of such opportunities:
- “... I think it will be a giant differential in my CV, mostly for the multinationals I am looking to get into.”
- 26 Despite “a large extent the relationship between mobility and employability is the missing link in the story, at least for the UK” (King *et al.*, 2010, p. 33) the evidences suggest that there is a link, in that credit-mobile students get better degrees and higher salaries. This might indicate that mobility creates added value for the students, although the authors consider “that mobile students are academically selected from the start, and to some extent socially selected too, through the social-class and travel experiences of their family backgrounds”. For the students, there is also evidence “that the experience of studying abroad, either on a conventional year abroad or for an entire degree

programme, will give them an edge in the employment stakes, especially if they have attended a prestigious foreign institution”.

- 27 Others interviewed by the Themis project had also stated that in Brazil study abroad is seen as an added value to the curriculum. Therefore, it is also seen as an opportunity to access better professional opportunities and obtain social class mobility. Beatriz was in London in 2009, and said that she realized that Brazil values a lot who has an experience abroad.

“I did not think it, I thought that was an illusory thing, but people take it very seriously. When I came back to Brazil, I ran for a vacancy in Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (DIEESE), and one of the things that they told me was that I had been selected because of my experience abroad. For them, my curriculum stood out from the others because I had made mobility ‘sandwich’ overseas.”

- 28 Maria was in Portugal (Aveiro) in 2006 and also said that this type of experience is highly valued in Brazil:

“They give value, they give value... When you go to Portugal is a little different because of the language, because the language is the same... But the people always give a lot of value when you go to an English-speaking country, because you came back with the mastery of another language, but in any case, I think that it is always valued.”

- 29 Glauca studies in Coimbra but teaches in Brazil, and said that she has used this as a strategy to obtain resources to study abroad:

“I am not on a scholarship, so if I did not have the money I would not stay, but because of the classes that I am still teaching in Brazil... so I stay between Brazil and Portugal.”

- 30 In other cases, investment is justified because the first option of getting a postgraduate qualification in Brazil is not possible, as in the case of Juliana in Lisbon:

“Definitely, teaching at University is something that I want, that appeals to me...for that I need at least a Master level... I had tried a Master in Brazil... came out in 4<sup>th</sup> place, among 148, but then my name did appear in the edict, something very strange... so Portugal was the language and I had a dear person that lives here... I sold my car... came with little money. I have money until March... after March I don’t know how my life will be like here...”

- 31 Rita, in Porto, points to the difficulties involved when financial resources are scarce:

“... the possibility of getting that diploma is very important for me, because I have other objectives, such as teaching, following an academic career... I said I would come... and then try to find work... I received a lot of help from friends, even after being here other people have sent me money... it is very complicated to get a job here... so I have started selling *brigadeiro* [Brazilian sweet]...”

- 32 Despite having access to the same international student mobility, the experiences of these students are also shaped by their financial constraints. These are in strike contrast with those of others that have the financial resources and do not have to work through their studies. For example, while João in Lisbon says:

“I do not have money to go to Brazil, I have no more money. If I had money to go there and thought it worthwhile to write the thesis there I would go. But what is most likely is that I will stay here two years without going to Brazil, working in underemployment if needed with the clear objective of getting the Masters”,

- 33 another more affluent student Laura, also in Lisbon, says:

“Financially, I am living here with my parents’ support... I did not experience many difficulties because in São Paulo the cost of living is not so different from here.”

- 34 These differentiated lived experiences resonate with the class differences found in other research on migration projects (Horst, Pereira & Sheringham, 2016). Nevertheless, while experiences may be different across class lines it is clear that public investment in scholarships has created opportunities for students from lower class backgrounds that are thus able to study abroad and that this experience generates future expectations among the students of a successful entry into the labour market in their chosen field. Scholarships have been a fundamental financial resource to give access to education and international student mobility in Brazil. However, due to inequalities in Brazil and the low income of an important part of the population even those students with access to scholarships for mobility may lack the extra money needed to support themselves abroad or they will probably experience it differently: saving, finding work, relying on loans. The distinction between private and public higher education also influences access to mobility. This is also intertwined with class belonging as public and private higher education is to a large extent divided along class lines in the Brazilian context, as we have seen. As such, students in private higher education institutions, which are most likely from more disadvantaged backgrounds, may struggle more to take that extra step into international study programs:

“That idea that the best go abroad is extremely wrong... unless you have money to support yourself with extra funds... Still those that leave are the ones with the financial condition to support themselves apart from the scholarship” (Lia, in Coimbra, from Public University in Brazil).

- 35 Another element of distinction across class lines that is hinted in the interviews is the influence of previous education and knowledge of English (see also Iorio & Silva, 2015). It is likely that stratification may occur per country of destination and also in academic performance after arrival due to unequal language abilities.

“I belong to an intermediate category, whose parents were able to pay an English course” (Gabriela, in Coimbra).

- 36 Those students who had the resources to enjoy a private English education may be in a position to choose a destination other than Portugal and also may be better positioned to achieve a higher attainment in a degree in Portugal where English is heavily used.
- 37 Even though it seems clear that in this case study class matters less in access to international student mobility due to the financial resources put in place to enable it and therefore contradicts some of the previous research pointing to international mobility as a way of retaining and reproducing privilege (Waters, 2012, p. 123), it does play out in more subtle ways in how people experience their study abroad program and in their choice of destination and academic performance.

## Conclusion

- 38 Despite starting off as a mobility of the “elites” the international student mobility of Brazilians in Portugal is increasingly becoming a project also of the middle and lower classes. This is largely related to both an expansion of higher education in Brazil and strong public investment in facilitating both as a strategy to raise the qualifications of national human resources and combat inequality. Students appear to be highly motivated to engage in such projects to raise their possibilities for a career in tune with their

aspirations and qualifications, mostly upon return to Brazil. This positive view of study abroad programs has lead even the students with lower financial resources to adopt different income earning strategies to be able to support such project, which is considered an added value for the labour market. For the more affluent students this mobility seems to have become more “normalized” and comparable in costs to what they would have experienced in large cities in Brazil, such as São Paulo. Further comparative research is still needed to explore the intersections between class belonging and experiences of student mobility: aims, aspirations, lived experiences (employment, contacts with Brazil, housing, access to cultural and social life, constitution of social networks) as well as the effective impacts upon return to Brazil. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore further the impact of class on the choice of destination and the impact of unequal geographies of education for future career prospects. The changing economic and political context in Brazil, following president Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment may have an impact in these processes as well, namely in terms of pursuit of international programs and decisions to return or stay further upon the completion of the studies. Transformations announced regarding the exclusion of undergraduate students from the program are likely to have a stronger impact on students from lower class backgrounds with consequences for overall social class inequalities.

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## NOTES

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2. [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundo\\_de\\_Financiamento\\_ao\\_Estudante\\_do\\_Ensino\\_Superior#cite\\_note-MudancasFIES-4](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundo_de_Financiamento_ao_Estudante_do_Ensino_Superior#cite_note-MudancasFIES-4).
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## ABSTRACTS

Brazil experienced since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century an important transformation in its education system. This process included the development and expansion of its higher education system as well as internationalization through investment in the international mobility of Brazilian students. This is in line with global trends on the internationalization of higher education. However, Brazil is also among the countries with higher inequalities. Both migration and education are shaped by social class inequalities however, little is actually known about the influence of class belonging in patterns of international student mobility. Focusing on the case of Brazilian higher education students in Portugal – one of their main destinations – this article examines the role of social class inequalities in international student mobility. Drawing on data collected through interviews with higher education representatives in Portugal and a survey and interviews with Brazilian students in Portugal, we are able to identify how the context of inequalities in Brazil contributes to shape both higher education trajectories (namely in the distinctions between attending private or state institutions) as well as the process and experience of international mobility in Portugal. Very importantly, we highlight the role of the political context in Brazil, including the phase of strong public investment in the fields of higher education and international student mobility and hint some changes following the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff.

Le Brésil a connu depuis la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle une transformation importante de son système éducatif. Ce processus comprenait le développement et l'expansion de son système d'enseignement supérieur ainsi que l'internationalisation à travers l'investissement dans la mobilité internationale des étudiants brésiliens. Ceci est en ligne avec les tendances mondiales sur l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur. Cependant, le Brésil est également un des pays avec des inégalités très élevées. La migration et l'éducation sont toutes deux façonnées par les inégalités de classes sociales, mais l'influence de l'appartenance de classe dans les modèles de mobilité internationale des étudiants est encore peu connue. En se concentrant sur le cas des étudiants brésiliens de l'enseignement supérieur au Portugal – l'une de leurs principales destinations – cet article examine le rôle des inégalités sociales dans la mobilité internationale des étudiants. Sur la base de données collectées lors d'entretiens avec des représentants de l'enseignement supérieur au Portugal et d'une enquête et d'entretiens auprès d'étudiants brésiliens au Portugal, nous pouvons identifier comment le contexte des inégalités au Brésil contribue à façonner les trajectoires de l'enseignement supérieur (notamment les distinctions entre relever d'institutions privées ou étatiques) ainsi que le processus et l'expérience de la mobilité internationale au Portugal. Très important, nous soulignons le rôle du contexte politique au Brésil, en particulier la phase d'investissements publics forts dans les domaines de l'enseignement supérieur et de la mobilité internationale des étudiants, et laissons entrevoir quelques changements suite à la destitution de la présidente Dilma Rousseff.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** student mobility, Brazil, Portugal, inequalities, public investment

**Mots-clés:** mobilité des étudiants, Brésil, Portugal, inégalités, investissement public

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